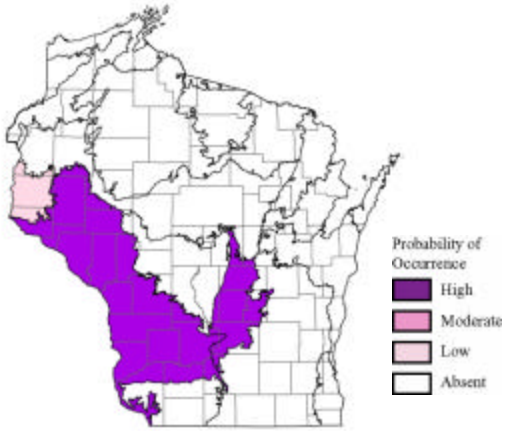
Paddlefish (*Polyodon spathula*)

Species Assessment Scores*

State rarity:	4
State threats:	4
State population trend:	3
Global abundance:	3
Global distribution:	5
Global threats:	4
Global population trend:	2
Mean Risk Score:	3.6
Area of importance:	2

* Please see the Description of Vertebrate Species Summaries (Section 3.1.1) for definitions of criteria and scores.



Ecological Landscape Associations
Please note that this is not a range map. Shading does not imply that the species is present throughout the Landscape, but represents the probability that the species occurs somewhere in the Landscape.

Landscape-community Combinations of Highest Ecological Priority

Ecological Landscape	Community
Central Sand Hills	Warmwater rivers
Western Coulee and Ridges	Warmwater rivers
Western Prairie	Warmwater rivers

Threats and Issues

- Habitat loss, degredation, and fragmentation from dams threatens this species. Dams eliminated traditional spawning sites (paddlefish can live in reservoirs but need streams for spawning), altered water flow regimes, dewatered streams, and eliminated backwater areas that were important as nursery and feeding areas. Dams without fish passages inhibit or prevent movement (this species may travel hundreds of kilometers) and upstream spawning migrations, and fragment populations.
- There is potential for illegal harvest of paddlefish for caviar, particularly when caviar prices are high. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that it is hard to sex paddlefish, so all fish captured are usually killed.
- Exotic bighead and silver carp, which now have established self sustaining populations in the Mississippi River basin, may threaten this species primarily through competition for food (both are large filter feeders).
- Alteration of the Mississippi River for the purposes of commercial navigation (including lock and dam structures) and flood prevention threatens this species in a variety of ways, including limiting the extent and duration of spring floods which negatively impacts paddlefish spawning. Collisions with boats and motors are a major issue for paddlefish in the Wisconsin River, as they are often just below the surface. 15% of the fish in the Wisconsin River have major wounds and scars attributable to boats. Collisions with towboats may also kill paddlefish in the Mississippi River.

Priority Conservation Actions

- Protection and restoration of large river habitat is needed for conservation of this species, including consideration of spawning areas (paddlefish need fast shallow water over gravel bars for spawning).
- Fish passages at dams are needed to facilitate movement, including upstream spring spawning migrations.
- The creation of no wake zones in areas of the Wisconsin River where paddlefish concentrate near the surface (such as the Prairie du Sac Dam tailwater) would benefit this species.
- Continued vigilance is needed to prevent illegal harvest of this species for caviar.
- More information on movement patterns and habitat use is needed, especially for juveniles, to aid conservation efforts targeted at this species.